

credited, owing, no doubt, to the advance of Christianity and education.

CEREMONIES AND CUSTOMS ATTENDING BIRTH AND NAMING
OF CHILDREN.

844 The Khasi birth ceremonies and customs are as follows:—
[784] When a child is born the umbilical cord is cut by a sharp
782 splinter of bamboo; no knife can be used on this occasion.
The Mundas of Chota Nagpur similarly taboo a metal instrument for this purpose. The child is then bathed in hot water from a red earthen pot. The placenta is carefully preserved in an earthen vessel in the house till after the naming ceremony has taken place. When the umbilical cord, after being tied, falls off, a puja is performed with eggs to certain water deities (*ka blei sam-um* and *ka niangriang*),* also to a forest spirit (*u'suid bri* or *u'suid khlár*). The naming ceremony of the child is performed the next morning after the birth. Certain females are invited to come and pound rice in a mortar into flour. The flour when ready is placed on a bamboo winnow (*u práh*). Fermented rice is mixed with water and is placed in a gourd. Some powdered turmeric is also provided, and is kept ready in a plantain leaf, also five pieces of *'kha piah*, or dried fish. The earthen pot containing the placenta is then placed in the *nongpei*, or centre room of the house. If the child is a male, they place near him a bow and three arrows (the implements of a Khasi warrior); if a female, a *da* and *u star*, or cane head-strap for carrying burdens. An elderly man, who knows how to perform the naming puja, which is called by the Khasis "*kaba jer khun*," places a plantain-leaf on the floor and sprinkles some water on it. He takes the gourd in his hand and calls a god to witness. The people assembled then mention a number of names for the child, and ask the man who is performing the puja to repeat them. This he does, and at the same time pours a little liquor from the gourd on to the ground. As he goes on pouring, the liquor by degrees becomes exhausted, and finally only a few drops remain. The name at the repeat-

* A spirit which is supposed to have the power of causing a disease of the navel of a child.

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553 when they do this they invariably fall crossed to the ground.
 "They thus save their eggs, save time and trouble, get the
 553 name they desire for the child. . . ." It is noteworthy that
 844 the Khasis consider it necessary to preserve the placenta until
 the ceremony of naming the child is over, and that the pot
 containing the placenta is waved over the head of the child
 before it is removed and hung up in a tree.

844 Dr. Fraser, at page 53 *et seq.* of the "Golden Bough," when
 171 dealing with the subject of sympathetic magic, refers to the
 navel string and the placenta as parts which are commonly
 believed amongst certain people to remain in sympathetic union
 with the body after the physical connection has been severed,
 and it is interesting to note that in the Babar Archipelago,
 between New Guinea and Celebes, the placenta is mixed with
 ashes and put in a small basket, which seven women, each
 of them armed with a sword, hang up on a tree of a peculiar
 kind (*citrus hystrix*). The women carry the swords for the
 purpose of frightening the evil spirits, otherwise the latter might
 get hold of the placenta and make the child sick. Mr. C. M.
 Pleyte, Lecturer on Indonesian Ethnology, at the Gymnasium
 William III. at Batavia, who has most courteously furnished
 me with some interesting information on this subject, states
 that it is especially in the Southern Moluccas that the placenta
 is mixed with ashes and hung in a tree. Wider spread is the
 custom of placing the after-birth on a small bamboo raft in a
 river "in order that it may be caught by crocodiles, incarnations
 of the ancestors, who will guard it till the person to whom it
 has belonged dies. Then the soul of the placenta is once more
 united with that of the dead man, and together they go to the
 realms of the dead. During lifetime the connection between
 men and their placentas is never withdrawn." The Khasis,
 although they cannot explain the meaning of the presence of
 the placenta at the naming ceremony, and the care with which
 they remove it and hang it up in a tree, are probably really
 actuated by the same sentiments as the inhabitants of the
 Southern Moluccas, i.e. they believe that there is, as Dr. Frazer
 puts it, a sympathetic union with the body after the physical
 846 connection with the child has been severed. There is no fixed
 784 period of *sang*, or taboo, after a birth, but the parents of the

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child are prohibited by custom from crossing a stream or washing their clothes until the navel-string falls off, for fear that the child should be attacked by the demons of the hills and the vales. 846 784

The Wár birth customs are substantially the same as those of the Khasis, but there is the difference that a Wár family after a birth is *sang*, or taboo, for seven days, whereas amongst the Khasis the only prohibition is that the parents must not cross a stream or wash their clothes until they have propitiated the spirits. A twin birth is *sang*, or taboo. The Khasis argue that as there is but one *Ka Iawbei* (first ancestress), and one *U Thawclang* (first ancestor), so one child, either male or female, should be born at a time. A twin birth is accordingly regarded as a visitation from God for some *sang*, or transgression, committed by some member of the clan. When the twins are of opposite sexes the *sang* is considered to be extremely serious, the Khasi idea being that defilement has taken place within the womb. The case is treated as one of *shong kur*, or marriage within the clan, and the bones of the twins cannot be placed in the sepulchre of the clan. 844 846 845 773 [766]

There are no special birth customs amongst the Lynngams. 844

There is no trace of the *couvade* amongst the Khasis. 846

MARRIAGE.

We now come to consider marriage amongst the Khasis from a religious point of view. Shadwell has said that marriage amongst the Khasis "is purely a civil contract." This statement is not correct, for there is an elaborate religious ceremony at which God the creator, *U'lei thaw briew man briew*, the god or goddess of the State, *U* or *ka'lei Synshar*, and, what is probably more important, the ancestress and ancestor of the clan, *Ka Iawbei-tymmen* and *U Thawclang*, are invoked. There are three marriage ceremonies prevalent amongst the Khasis, which are (a) *Pynhiarsynjat*, (b) *Lamdoh*, and (c) *Iadih-kiad*, respectively. The first and second forms above mentioned are considered the more respectable; the last-named is resorted to by the very poor who cannot afford the greater expense entailed by the first two ceremonies. 585 776

wood are placed around the body, and the egg; "*u'leng kpoh*," is broken, not over the stomach of the deceased, as has been sometimes supposed, but by being thrown on the pyre in the direction of the feet of the corpse. Fire is applied to the pyre, first by the *kur*, or members of the clan, and then by the children, if any, of the deceased. Another fowl, "*u'iar padat*," is sacrificed, its blood being smeared round the pyre three times, and across the corpse three times. The bier is then broken to pieces, the cloths having been removed from it previously. The eatables and the jaw-bones of the sacrificial animals are then placed at the head of the pyre. After the fowl (*u'iar padat*) has been sacrificed, the three arrows already mentioned are shot from the bow, one to the north, another to the south, and the third to the east. These arrows are called *ki'nam tyupem*. It is, perhaps, significant that the arrows which are shot at death correspond in numbers with those which are used at the time of the birth ceremony. When the fire has blazed up, another goat, "*u'lang dholia*," is sacrificed. In some cases all the clothes of the deceased are burnt with the body, in others the clothes are merely held over the fire and then taken away, after which they can be used (this is only in the case of poor persons). Before leaving the burning-place the relatives and friends of the deceased place betel-nuts on the pyre and bid farewell to the deceased, saying "*Khablei khie leit bam kwai sha iing u Blei ho*" (good-bye, go and eat betel-nut in the house of god). When the body has been thoroughly burnt, the fire is extinguished with water, and the uncalcined bones are collected by the relatives in three trips. The collectors are not allowed to turn back and pick up a bone which has been forgotten in any one of these trips. The bones thus collected are carefully wrapped in a piece of white cloth by the female relatives, and an old member of the family throws on the ground some powdered rice from a leaf, at the same time adjuring the spirit of the deceased not to trouble the *kur*, or the family, as the funeral ceremonies have been duly performed. The party then sets out to the bone repository, or *marshieng*. In front walks one who strews along the line of route leaves of the tree known by the Khasis as *dieng shit* (the berries of which are used for fishing with), and grains of rice, all the way from the pyre to the cairn.

- 582 marry any one belonging to your own *kur*, or clan. Unlike the
614 Khasis, however, a L ynngam can marry two sisters at a time.
- 595 The L ynngam marriages are arranged by *ksiangs*, or go-betweens,
584 much in the same way as Khasi marriages; but the ritual
582 observed is less elaborate, and shows a mixture of Khasi and
Gar o customs (see Section III.). The L ynngams intermarry
583 with the Garos. It appears that sometimes the parents of girls
exact bride-money, and marriages by capture have been heard
of. Both of these customs are more characteristic of the Bodo
• 841 tribes of the plains than of the Khasis. There are no special birth
782 customs, as with the Khasis, except that when the umbilical cord
553 falls a fowl is sacrificed, and the child is brought outside the
house. Children are named without any special ceremony.
- 714 The death customs of the L ynngams have been described in
Section III. A peculiar characteristic is the keeping of the
dead body in the house for days, sometimes even for several
months, before it is burnt. The putrefying corpse inside the
house seems to cause these people no inconvenience, for
whilst it remains there, they eat, carry on their ordinary
avocations, and sleep there, regardless of what would be
considered by others an intolerable nuisance. The religion of
711 these people consists of a mixture of ancestor-worship and the
propitiation of the spirits of fell and fall, which are, most of them,
believed to be of evil influence, as is the case with other savage
races. As with the people of Nongstoin, the primaeval
716 ancestress, "*ka Iaw bei*," is worshipped for the welfare of the
782 clan, a sow being sacrificed to her, with a gourd of rice-beer, and
leaves of the oak, or *dieng-sning* tree. The leaves of the oak are
afterwards hung up inside the house, together with the jaw-bone
of the pig. Sacrifices are offered to a forest demon, *U Bang-
jang* (a god who brings illness), by the roadside; also to *Ka
Miang Bylli U Majymma*, the god of cultivation, at seed time,
on the path to the forest clearing where the seed is sown.
Models of paddy store-houses, baskets and agricultural imple-
ments are made, sand being used to indicate the grain. These are
placed by the roadside, the skulls of the sacrificial animals and
the feathers of fowls being hung up on lamboos about the place
793 where the sacrifice has been performed. There are no priests or
796 *lyngdohs*, the fathers of the hamlet performing the various cere-
monies.

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today, but await with
patience the cause and
the way! So much, is
it not so! --

II. Religion in Various Aspects of Life.

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1. Giving a Name (tap lubri tap kyrteng).

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By tap lubri tap kyrteng one means the
782 ceremony of the giving of a name to a child.

In the section on sang I have already indicated
the various taboos of a pregnant mother in re-
gard to her husband.

At the birth of a child now, so the Khasi
say, there are not as many ceremonies as at the
death of a relative. For birth is anyhow in and
of itself a feast of joy, since one is more joy-
ful when a person enters life than when he de-
parts from life.

[426] When a child is born, sacrifices are
made on the next day (if it was born in the eve-
ning or in the night, on the following morning)
and the ceremony of giving the name is per-
formed. The sacrificer must be a relative of
the child's. Among the Synteng, aunts of the
child are called on by preference as executors
of the sacrifice. The umbilical chord is cut
off with a sharp-edged piece of bamboo and the
child is bathed in warm water. The afterbirth
(ka shynnai) is carefully kept in an earthen
pot in the house (nongpei). Instruments are
then placed at the child's side as symbols of
later occupations, near a girl a knife (i
wait) and a woven bamboo carrier (i star); but
near a boy a bow (ka tyntieh) and three arrows
(ki 'nam). The sacrificer fetches a little
plate, on which he sprinkles rice meal and fills
a gourd bottle (u klong) with rice brandy,
which he previously mixes with water. He

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arranges all this on a bamboo swing (u prah) and then begins the sacrifice with the following words:

Te ha sngew ko
blei trai kynrad ko
thaw-bynriew ko
buhbynriew te ba long
ka jer ba long ka
thoh ban neh ka nam
ban neh ka kyrteng
ban long u lubri ban
long ka kyrteng wei
la suk la sngewbha
phi ka blei ban khot
da kata ka kyrteng to
kein ba un long tym-
men un long san un
sain la ka kur la ka
jaid un bad la ka
khein ka bishar ha
kpoh la iing mo.

Te sngew sa ka
jong me u thawlang
babha bamiat te wei
ym don ka sang ka
kyndiah te la long
kynthei la long
shynrang te a un long
rangbah man rangbah
yn sah ka nam yn
sah ka kyrteng moi

And so hear, o god
and lord, o creator and
maker of men! for now
the name-giving and the
noting-down shall oc-
cur, so that the fame
may last and the name
be kept, after it has
pleased thee, o god-
dess, to name with this
name. Now may it (the
child) live to an old
age and become great
and strong in his de-
scendants and races,
and may he keep and ob-
serve the commands and
justice of his family.

And so hear thou
also, o thou good and
beautiful Thaulang,
since now for once no
taboo and no difficult-
ty exist and little
woman and little man
are (and a child was
born), so may he become
big and become a
strong man and may the
fame remain and the
name remain preserved.
Is it no so!

Meanwhile the sacrificer slowly sprinkles
the brandy on the rice meal so that a dough is
made. Now one seeks for the name of the child.

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While he pronounces several names, he very slowly pours the rice liquor out on the ground. The name, then, that coincides with the drop that takes the longest to free itself from the neck of the gourd bottle, is given the child. When the name is found by this method, the sacrificer makes a mark on each foot of the child with the dough mentioned above, thus giving him the name.

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[427] But if somebody comes into the hut by chance while the liquor is being poured out and says something, then a name formed from these words is given the child. Then the parents and relatives of the child must eat three times from this dough. When this is all over, the father takes the placenta, sprinkles rice meal on it and swings it three times over the head of the child. Thereupon he leaves the house and fastens the jar including the contents to a tree near the hut. Today this ceremony is seldom done exactly. Usually the father only goes in the yard and buries the placenta somewhere.

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When the father returns, his feet are sprinkled with water ban khuid ban jhiak krat i khunlung, i.e. so that the child may stay healthy. A rice cake (u purew) which was prepared earlier is now eaten by everybody. Thereupon all the relatives sit down, the relatives of the wife on the left and the relatives of the husband on the right. A piece of the rice cake (purew) is dipped in water and the toes of all the guests are wiped with it. After the end of these ceremonies the utensils which were placed at the side of the child, the bow, the three arrows, the knife and the carrying straps, are taken away and carefully fastened to the inside of the roof of the hut.

553 that a Khasi told him, [428] that all kinds of nuisance and deceptions occur with this method of name giving since one likes to save time and trouble."

"The dried fish are held by each end and cut into two pieces. Finally one wipes the yellow root that has been mixed with water on the right foot of the father, the mother, and the child."

244 Among the Synteng the following items are
782 offered in sacrifice immediately after the
553 birth of a child: some rice meal, eggs, roots and leaves. After the child is a month old (one often waits two months) the ceremony of the name giving is performed. This is done, if not by the sister of the mother, then by the oldest man of the sib. Sacrifices are brought again at this celebration, specifically two hens and a goat.

• 844 The parents of a newborn child are not allowed to cross a river, nor may they wash their clothes as long as the umbilical cord is not healed, since otherwise the mountain or river devil would harm the child.

• 845 Twins are considered a punishment, which has been incurred by somebody in the sib for violating a taboo. If the twins are of different sex, their bones may not later be placed in the common family grave.

782 2. Sacrifices during the Illness of a
785 Member of the Family.

[783] Usually sacrifices are made only for internal illnesses. Because the Khasi cannot explain the origin of these illnesses, they are of the opinion that a devil has caused them. He must be angry with the person concerned

60 P. R. T. Gurdon—*Note on the Khasis, Syntengs, & allied Tribes*. [No. 4,

611 custom prevails amongst the Syntengs. Inheritance to the post of Siem
 428 (or chief) also passes through the female line, there being special
 customs of inheritance for each of the different chiefships.

3. The Khasis are divided into clans, or *bar*. These clans are
 614 strictly exogamous. Some of these clans derive their names from ani-
 mals, insects, trees or fish,—e.g., the *tham* clan, *tham* meaning a crab;
 the *chrick* clan, *chrick* meaning a monkey; the *reni* clan, so called from
 a fish by name *reni*; the *diempok* clan, *diempok* meaning a certain tree.
 There are other instances also. In each instance, the clan is said to
 have sprung from the animal, fish, or tree, as the case may be. There
 then appears to be a trace of totemism amongst the Khasis, although
 now-a-days their totems are not worshipped, nor do people abstain from
 killing, eating, or utilising them. A man when he marries does not
 cease to belong to the *bar* or family of his mother, but his children be-
 long to the *bar* of the man's wife. Frequently the husband merely
 visits his wife at her mother's house. It is seldom the case that a man
 takes his wife to his own house, certainly not until several children
 have been born.

As might be expected, owing to the influence of the matriarchate,
 542 Khasi and Synteng women enjoy a much greater share of liberty than
 is usually the case with the sex. Although not wishing to make any
 general insinuations, there can be no doubt that Khasi women enjoy
 considerable freedom in their sexual relations. Women do all the trad-
 ing, and like their Manipuri sisters make all the bazar purchases.

4. *Ancestor worship*.—The Khasis propitiate *Ka Jaubei*, the first
 767 maternal ancestor of the clan, by sacrificing a pig; they also sacrifice
 yearly to *U Suidais* (the departed maternal great-uncle). Also when a
 family is in trouble, *U Thawlang* (the departed great-grandfather) is
 propitiated. Ancestors are further worshipped by the erection of memo-
 rial stones. These memorial stones will be noticed separately.

5. *Birth customs*.—At the birth the navel of a child must not be
 844 severed by any instrument made of iron or steel, but by a sharp splinter
 of bamboo. The placenta is placed in a pot and is kept inside the house
 till the ceremony of naming the child takes place. As long as the
 placenta remains in the house, the latter is *sang*, or taboo, to anyone
 except the members of the family. On the day of the ceremony of
 naming the child, the father removes the placenta and buries it outside
 the house. Having done this, the feet of the father are washed with water
 before he re-enters the house. When the ceremony takes place, pow-
 dered rice is placed on a sieve (a *grab*) and a small bow and three
 arrows. If the child is a male, and a *woit* (or *da*) and a star or (cane strap)
 (worn across the forehead when carrying a load by the Khasis), if the
 child is a female.

household deities, and messianic and ancestral deities. 776
 Deities of the first two categories are simply aspects 777
 of the high God or Gods. • The earth is pop-
 ulated with two great orders of land demons and
 water demons who cause all undesirable, unnatural,
 and otherwise inexplicable events, acting either on
 their own or as instruments in the hands of sorcerers.
 Apart from omens, both in nature and in dreams, 787
 Khasis attach supernatural significance also to mystic 788
 numbers, and to the colors white, black, and red.
 They hold especially important folk beliefs regarding
 betel nut, paddy rice, gold and silver, and clothing. 789
 Practitioners. The two classes of religious practition- 791
 ers are the village or state priests and the sacrificers. 792
 Both are male. They use the same divinatory tech-
 niques of reading broken eggshells and the entrails
 of cocks, and they both sacrifice cocks, hens, goats,
 pigs, and cattle. Their skills are not taught to them
 so much as picked up by observation and confirmed
 by demonstrations of efficacy. A priest is elected
 from among the men of his tribe to direct his skills to
 the public good until he dies, and his rewards are
 institutionalized and come from the village or the
 state. A sacrificer acts for private persons or kin
 groups, on call, and is rewarded by them personally
 with gifts in cash or in kind. The sacrificer is called
 upon to explain and then to ritually remedy every
 variety of misfortune, especially illness, though his
 powers are nowadays regarded with ambivalence,
 and he is widely expected to become a sorcerer
 sooner or later. • There are two major types of sor- 794
 cerer. One is the ritual specialist or sacrificer who
 secretly turns his skills from good to evil, manipulat-
 ing demons to injure a person or kin group, and
 acting always for himself alone out of considerations
 of jealousy or revenge. The other is normally a lead-
 ing citizen, a woman who is so wealthy and success-
 ful that it is believed that she must keep a shien, i.e.
 a creature which will bring her prosperity as long as
 she feeds it periodically with human blood. To pro-
 vide this blood, the men of her household, or other
 males whom she bewitches with a special whisky,
 will indiscriminately murder anyone except a mem-
 ber of her matrilineage. The jaintias have an ana- 795
 logue to the shien in their taro, except that the
 ultimate result is death from illness rather than
 murder. Minor witchcraft can be perpetrated by
 poison keepers or persons with an evil eye, who are
 often women. Ceremonies. The important traditional
 ceremonies were the life-crisis rituals relating to
 pregnancy and childbirth, the naming of a child, and
 death. Lesser ceremonies related to marriage and
 divorce, and to housebuilding. All these rituals were
 addressed primarily to the ancestors, and they are
 still performed in modified form by many Khasis.
 Other rituals, which were performed by groups such
 as villages, subvillages, local descent groups, or households,
 were addressed to the unnamed aspects of the high 796